

# **Dorchester County Parks and Recreation Master Plan Update**

4/4/2016

## ***Executive Summary***

Originally published in April of 2009, the *Dorchester County Parks and Recreation Master Plan* is the result of a deliberate process designed to “evaluate recreational facilities, activities and programs currently offered in Dorchester County, gather input from county residents on various recreational issues and guide the county in the establishment and provision of complementary recreation services.” Shortly after establishing the county Parks and Recreation Department with the hiring of its first staff member, the *2015 Parks and Recreation Master Plan Update* was completed and presented to County Council in April of that year. Together, these documents present a guide for how the newly formed Dorchester County Parks and Recreation Department (DCPRD) will “meet the current and future recreational needs for the people of Dorchester County.”

A considerable amount of new information has been gathered since April 2015, which has impacted various portions of this guide. This has necessitated a *2016 Update* to the plan.

In some cases, site planning and regulatory work has drastically changed the park programs most suitable to specific properties. The Pine Trace and Eagle Run sites have been impacted by large swaths of jurisdictional wetlands that will render even the moderately active components recommended in the *2015 Update* impractical. Pine Trace and Eagle Run will still serve crucial public recreation roles as preserved natural areas in the densely populated North Charleston/Summerville region and as hubs for the Eagle-Chandler Bridge Creek Trail network. Wetland work has been completed on the Ashley River and Courthouse Park sites, and those recommended programs remain largely unchanged.

Feedback gathered as part of the *2015 Update* presentation to the public led to some tweaks to the overall plan. Western county residents voiced their desire to ensure inclusion of multiuse features at the Courthouse Park that would accommodate a wide range of activities in addition to active sports pursuits. A community gathering space in the form of an open air pavilion, an event lawn, and a spray fountain have now been incorporated into the current park design effort.

Residents in the Ridgeway area voiced considerable concern and little support for development plans of a park site adjacent to Bridlewood Farms subdivision. Generally, meeting attendees and survey results proclaimed the location as undesirable for a park. Many felt it is too far removed from downtown Ridgeway to serve this population. Bridlewood Farms residents cited worries over increased traffic through the neighborhood

should a park open there. As a result, development of the Bridlewood Farms site has become a lower priority in the current update, and it is now recommended to be developed in conjunction with the school site that shares the property.

Also during the feedback process, the public reiterated its high demand for trail, bicycle, and pedestrian infrastructure. Access to trails and creating bike and pedestrian linkages between recreation facilities was regarded as a major priority among meeting attendees and survey respondents.

As part of the *2016 Update* effort, the Dorchester County Parks and Recreation Commission undertook a prioritizing process in regard to the major recreation infrastructure projects found in the plan. Drawing on feedback from the *2015 Update*, incorporating the site data gathered over the previous year, and balancing the taxpayer burden with the need to provide residents with a true countywide park system, the Commission worked together to select several projects to be recognized as highest priority. These projects include development of Ashley River Park, Courthouse Park, and Pine Trace Natural Area.

A major change from the *2015 Update* is an even greater focus on trails and bike/pedestrian infrastructure. Projects such as an Ashley River Park to Rosebrock Park connection, Dorchester Road catwalk crossing, Eagle-Chandler Trail development, and Western County trail development were rated highest priority and placed on equal footing with the other more traditional park projects.

To jumpstart these facility initiatives, the Commission has recommended County Council place a twenty year bond referendum on the November 2016 ballot to raise \$12.5 million in capital funds. Current estimates split the allocation of the bond proceeds roughly evenly between the more traditional park projects and the trail endeavors. Debt service on the bond would equate to a property tax increase of approximately two mills.

Options for securing an adequate recurring revenue stream for operations and maintenance of recreational facilities was also investigated. The key difference between funding mechanisms lies in whether property tax revenue is generated through creation of a new “park district” or as a part of Dorchester County’s general operations expense. Due to Home Rule provisions, the former would require municipalities within the county to “opt-in” to the taxing district prior to a voter referendum. The latter option would be a part of the annual county budget process and any increases in millage to accommodate park operations would automatically apply to taxpayers countywide. Both tracks would be subject to millage caps imposed by Act 388. Therefore, without amendments to state law, any millage increases to support county park system operations and maintenance would be incremental and as allowed by the CPI + population growth + look back millage formula.

By FY20-21, when all bonded projects are open and fully operational, the total annual recurring cost for the DCPRD park system is estimated at \$1,382,891 by this plan.

\$400,000 of this amount is recommended for pay-as-you-go projects including conservation projects, Recreation Outreach Grants to county partners, trails, and other projects. Recommended funding sources include cable franchise fees, at least 1.6 mills in countywide levied property tax, and revenue from rentals, fees, and permits.

Lastly, in addition to ongoing planning efforts, real accomplishments were realized over the past year. Rosebrock Park was improved through volunteer trail workdays, general park signage updates, and installation of eleven trailside interpretive panels. Staff secured \$350,000 from various grant sources for work on Ashley River Blue Trail access sites at Bacon's Bridge and Swan Drive. Both sites will be carry-down access only. Friends of Dorchester County Parks incorporated as a nonprofit organization and established 501(c)(3) status. The Board of Directors is steadily being filled and the formal launch for this parks support group will coincide with its first fundraiser scheduled for April 30<sup>th</sup>. Department staff has continued to build both internal and external partnerships that will pay dividends in years to come.

In summary, regulatory work and public feedback undertaken since the *2015 Update* have resulted in considerable changes in the *Dorchester County Parks and Recreation Master Plan*. With input from the Parks and Recreation Commission, department staff has further refined the plan and mapped out a path to implementation beginning with a capital bond referendum in November 2016. Options for securing an adequate revenue stream for parks and recreation have been vetted and presented for County Council's consideration. The department continues to move forward with implementing small but value-added improvement projects, seeking grant and private funding, and developing a support base in the community for county park endeavors.

## ***Introduction***

Many circumstances under which the *2015 Parks and Recreation Master Plan Update* were developed have changed. Site planning and regulatory work has provided critical information that will determine the nature in which specific recreation infrastructure will be developed. Public feedback on the *2015 Update* was gathered primarily through a survey instrument and public forums. Details and legal aspects of funding streams for park and recreation efforts in Dorchester County have been vetted. In order to maintain the relevance of this guide, the plan must be updated in order to account for the current opportunities and challenges that impact Dorchester County's efforts to improve upon its parks and recreation system. The original plan calls for the goals and objectives found therein to "be revisited, and if necessary, modified each year in order to meet the needs of Dorchester County residents." This effort is an attempt to incorporate information gleaned over the past year into the plan.

Organization of this document is similar to the *2015 Update* with a few minor changes. The first section provides status updates to the original 2009 "Action Plan". Immediately following each action item's update, recommendations for each item's next steps (where applicable) are proposed. One difference in this current version of the *Master Plan Update* is the inclusion of an additional breakout of the Parks and Recreation Recommendations category of the Action Plan between "Infrastructure" and "Other" projects. Within Infrastructure projects, a distinction is made between high priority projects the Commission has recommended for referendum bond funding and all other infrastructure projects.

The second section projects the budgetary implications of the recommendations presented in the first section. Here, recurring personnel and operations costs, as well as one-time capital costs, are anticipated, and potential funding sources are provided. Additionally, this section offers insights into the maintenance and operations plan through FY 20-21. Lastly, the third section offers concluding thoughts on the information presented.

## ***Action Plan Review and Next Steps***

The original master plan provides a detailed action plan for the establishment and provision of recreational services by Dorchester County. Action items are presented in four main categories:

- Parks and Recreation Policy
- Parks and Recreation Recommendations
- Parks and Recreation Staffing
- Parks and Recreation Funding Sources

A primary focus of this section will be to provide status updates on each action item category – highlighting progress, setbacks, anticipated short-term actions, and general situational changes that affect the implementation of these plans as originally described in 2009. Each item update is followed by a recommendation of next steps.

### **Parks and Recreation Policy**

Policy is set by County Council in Dorchester County. This section focuses on Council actions that impact the structure and governance of county-led parks and recreation initiatives.

- ***Establish a permanent Parks and Recreation Department for Dorchester County.***

The role of the Dorchester County Facilities, Maintenance, and Recreation Department expanded slightly with the opening of the only County-owned public park (Rosebrock Park) in September of 2011. However, a stand-alone Parks and Recreation Department was not established until the hiring of a Director in September of 2014. Funding for this new Department is currently maintained at a level minimally above the cost of this single staff position and debt service obligations.

In December of 2014, the Director worked with the Parks and Recreation Commission to develop and adopt a mission statement to guide the new department's initiatives:

*Dorchester County Parks and Recreation Department strives to provide sustainable recreational, cultural, and leisure opportunities that complement the diverse and progressive nature of our community and enhance quality of life for residents and visitors.*

This mission statement is in line with Dorchester County's broader mission and vision statements, and incorporates many guiding principles of the master plan.

**Recommendation:** 1) Identify and allocate the recurring and reliable funding necessary to support park development and operation efforts initiated by the Parks and Recreation Department Director.

- **Establish four park districts geographically divided by the county's major water features. Establish a Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee with equal representation from each park district. Establish Park District Advisory Boards for each park district.**

In February of 2011, County Council passed Ordinance Number 11-03 creating the Dorchester County Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC) with one member seat to be filled by a member from each park district as well as a member seat to be filled by the Chairman of the Public Safety, Health and Human Services Committee of Dorchester County Council. This ordinance also created ex-officio, non-voting members of the PRC with permanent seats held by both county school districts and the Summerville YMCA. There was also a provision allowing the PRC to elect additional ex-officio members as deemed relevant.

In May of 2013, County Council passed Ordinance Number 13-07 significantly altering the makeup of the Parks and Recreation Commission. The most important impact of this ordinance was the de facto elimination of the park districts. County Council was concerned that the four district system would result in overrepresentation and/or underrepresentation in various parts of the county. To address this concern, the ordinance provided for each of the seven County Council members to nominate one resident for appointment to the PRC by majority vote. The ordinance also eliminated the non-voting ex-officio members (though reserved the section for future use) and allowed for one County Council member to be appointed to a PRC seat by a majority vote of County Council. Park District Advisory Boards have not been established to this point.

**Recommendation:** 1) Maintain existing PRC membership structure, but remain aware of the documented needs for all areas of the county. Staff capacity will not be able to support subdivisions of the PRC for some time.

2) Consider restoring ordinance language allowing for reinstatement of ex-officio positions appointed by the PRC on an as-needed basis. This will allow organization representatives to cycle in and out as needed, and will make adherence to *Roberts Rules of Order* an easier task.

## **Park and Recreation Recommendations**

This section focuses on specific actions the master plan recommends for the purpose of broadening the amount and variety of recreational facilities and activities available to county residents and visitors. Projects in this section are divided between infrastructure and non-infrastructure categories. “Infrastructure Projects” are limited only to those projects directly resulting in a new or expanded, on the ground recreational facility. Action items such as planning endeavors, partnership opportunities, and dissemination of information are categorized under “Other Projects”.

### **Infrastructure Projects – Highest Priority**

In January 2016, the Dorchester County Parks and Recreation Commission worked together to prioritize what it viewed as the most important projects to jumpstarting a countywide park system. The result is a recommendation that the projects found immediately below be funded in the amount of \$12.5 million through a voter-approved bond referendum in November of 2016. These projects include trails, Ashley River Park, Courthouse Park, and Pine Trace Natural Area.

### **Trails**

In each iteration of Dorchester County’s recreation facility planning and public feedback endeavors, trails, bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure have consistently risen to the top of documented public demand. The Parks and Recreation Commission recognizes the great economic, health, and social value in connecting parks, residential areas, schools, and commercial districts with trails. While a popular arterial trail, Sawmill Branch Trail, has been in place on the south side of Summerville for many years, other specific opportunities to build on this trail asset and to begin creating a new system in Western Dorchester County have been identified as a crucial component in the *2016 Update*. An explanation of each project is found below.

- ***Rosebrock Park – Ashley River Park Connector*** – Rosebrock Park currently boasts 1.5 miles of moderately used natural surface trails. As the crow flies, Ashley River Park is located about fifty yards from Rosebrock Park, and will feature an extensive trail system. Unfortunately, the two parks couldn’t seem further apart as they are separated by a newly expanded four lane highway and the Ashley Scenic River. Furthermore, the beautiful, new multiuse path that was part of highway construction does not continue along the shoulder of this highway adjacent to Rosebrock Park, providing a major obstacle to traveling on foot or bike between residential areas, parks, and local schools. Connecting the two parks will require both

crossing the highway underneath the new vehicular bridge, and crossing the Ashley River with a standalone bike and pedestrian bridge. A combination of highway ROW and Rosebrock Park property could be utilized to fill in the missing multiuse path gap. The connection between park facilities is even more crucial due to anticipated opportunities to extend the trail system upstream of the Ashley River toward Highway 17A.

**Recommendation:** 1) Utilize 2016 voter-approved bond funding to connect Rosebrock Park to Ashley River Park via a sub-grade pedestrian crossing underneath Bacon's Bridge and a dedicated bridge for bikes and pedestrians to cross the Ashley River. A seamless link between Ashley River Park and Rosebrock Park is essential to maximizing the utility of each individual park.

2) Utilize voter-approved bond funding to close the gap in multiuse path along Highway 165.

3) Utilize bond proceeds to leverage non-local funding for this project.

- ***Eagle-Chandler Bridge Creeks Trail System*** – The Eagle-Chandler trail system was conceived of nearly a decade ago and consists of the idea of placing paved and boardwalk surface trail along the maintenance shelf of these respective creeks. These creeks are similar in nature to the Sawmill Branch Trail in that the majority of the stretch has been channelized by the USACE. Phase I of this project will pave a 0.8 mile section extending from Ladson Road downstream to Hummingbird Lane, where the county currently owns ROW to access the maintenance shelf. This project is funded through the Transportation Alternatives Program and matching funds from Dorchester County. Dorchester County Public Works is managing Phase I of the project, which is expected to be completed in 2017.

Phase II consists of paving the trail upstream to Miles Jamison Road, where Pine Trace Natural Area will be located and serve as the northern terminus offering an extensive internal trail system. This route will largely follow the Chandler Bridge Creek corridor in a northwestward direction.

Recent improvements with multiuse path along Wallace Ackerman Drive and Old Fort Drive, existing sidewalk on Ladson Road, and planned improvements to fill in sidewalk gaps along Old Fort Drive will effectively create a 4.5 mile loop path of varying surfaces. Additionally, this trail system



will be connected to the Sawmill Branch Trail via sidewalk on Dorchester Road.

Development of Phase III of the trail project will follow Eagle Creek, as it splits from Chandler Bridge Creek, in a northeastward direction to its intersection with the multiuse path on Wallace Ackerman Drive. The Eagle Run Natural Area will accommodate most of this trail route, and provide opportunities for additional looping trails and neighborhood connections in the future.

**Recommendation:** 1) Utilize 2016 voter-approved bond funding to complete Phases II and III of the Eagle-Chandler Trail system.

2) Utilize bond proceeds to leverage non-local funding for this project.

3) Continue to work with Dorchester County Public Works to implement Phase I. Assist with development of trail signage to dedicate and market this little known bike and pedestrian route once completed.

- **Sawmill Branch Trail System** – The original master plan recommended an extension of the Sawmill Branch Trail from its current terminus at the Oakbrook YMCA, onward to Dorchester Road, and connecting across Dorchester Road into Colonial Dorchester State Historic Site and Jessen's Boat Landing. A South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) Transportation Alternatives Grant was secured for this project with matching funds from both Dorchester County and the Town of Summerville. Dorchester County Public Works Department, which is managing the project, received notice to proceed from SCDOT in late 2014 and currently estimates construction completion in late 2016. This extension will add over one mile to the trail system and create two significant new connections to recreation facilities.

However, the at grade crossings of heavily traveled Dorchester Road present a safety issue that will prevent many if not most users from fully utilizing the new extensions. The Parks and Recreation Commission feels a catwalk or ramp-like elevated crossing is essential to continue building upon the success of the Sawmill Branch Trail. From Colonial Dorchester, the next vital connection the Sawmill Branch should make will be to Ashley River Park. This segment would connect Ashley River Park all the way to downtown Summerville primarily on off-road trail.

In a complementary effort, the county, town, and YMCA have agreed on a partnership that will utilize up to \$18,727.92 of Dorchester County's Parks and Recreation Development (PARC) Fund allocation to improve the YMCA trailhead that is currently in very poor condition. These funds were allocated by the County Legislative Delegation in January of 2016. This project will primarily address access road and parking surface conditions while also seeking to include aesthetic enhancements and user amenities such as signage, landscaping and rest stations.

**Recommendation:** 1) Utilize 2016 voter-approved bond funding to install a safe, elevated crossing for the trail over Dorchester Road.

2) Utilize bond proceeds to leverage non-local funding for this project.

3) Work with the Town of Summerville and the YMCA to add a picnic shelter to Oakbrook YMCA trailhead. This addition will create a hub for trail activities and events such as races, walks, and educational programming. Funding from the Recreational Trails Program (RTP) or PARC would be appropriate for this project.

4) Work with Town of Summerville and YMCA to plan and fund bike rental or bike share infrastructure along the trail. Such a program would encourage trail usage, especially among visitors to Dorchester County.

- **Western County Trail Development** – Considerable feedback provided from the survey and 2015 public forums in Western Dorchester County (that area comprising Ridgeville, St. George, Givhans, Harleyville, Reevesville, and the more rural areas in between) indicated a desire for trail development among residents in this region. Utilizing existing canal maintenance shelves and utility ROW to link communities is a major focus. Additionally, better connecting the Courthouse Park to surrounding communities and expanding the trail system inside of the Courthouse property were discussed as potential trail projects. The ongoing BCD COG Bike and Pedestrian Master Plan process will aid in prioritizing projects for this region.

1) Utilize 2016 voter-approved bond funding to initiate the first major trail project in Western Dorchester County.

2) Utilize bond proceeds to leverage non-local funding for this project.

### **Ashley River Park**

The Ashley River Park Site comprises 85 acres of future parkland owned by Dorchester County. This property was purchased in 2012 at a cost of \$1.45 million with proceeds from the 2010 voter-approved \$5 million bond referendum for parks and conservation.

The Ashley River Park Site is a property that was partially developed as a residential community, but was stalled by the 2008 economic recession. As a result, there exists within the property a notable amount of infrastructure of varying quality and utility including road beds, permitted tributary crossings, storm sewer, a six-acre pond, gazebo, a river dock, and a natural riverside trail with boardwalk sections.

Perhaps an even more important feature of the property is the 0.75 miles of frontage abutting the Ashley Scenic River. A twenty-two mile segment of the river was designated a South Carolina Scenic River in 1998, making it the first of its kind to be established in the Lowcountry. According to SCDNR, “The Ashley River is perhaps unparalleled in its unique combination of historical significance and natural resource value as a relatively undisturbed tidal ecosystem”. Building upon these attributes, non-profit organization American Rivers launched the Ashley River Blue Trail in 2015. Waterproof maps have been produced and were funded through a corporate donation and a local grant opportunity. Ongoing efforts to install the final access points at Ashley River Park and upriver Swan Drive property will complete the essential “bones” of the blue trail. Additional information is provided in greater detail under the *Blueways* section.

The Ashley River Park Site holds exceptional opportunity to become the premier hub for outdoor recreation and adventure, environmental education, and ecotourism pursuits on the blueway. SCDNR has started a game fish stocking program at the site’s pond, and has indicated that a minimal level of SCDNR funding for construction of a fishing structure is available. Additionally, talks with several canopy tour/ropes challenge course companies have suggested that the site would be ideal for such an outdoor adventure amenity, which would provide a solid opportunity for revenue generation. Other outdoor adventure amenities are currently being explored.

While the Ashley River Park Site does not hold the acreage to serve as a regional park, its usage is expected to be similarly high based on its location to existing and planned population centers. Therefore, it is best to think of this park as a hybrid small regional/special use park with the special uses focused on a balancing both active and passive outdoor recreation opportunities. The predominantly passive Rosebrock Park is currently disconnected from the Ashley River Park Site, but considering the major goal of connecting the sites, the balance of active and passive opportunities as a whole, and the combined total acreage of 155 acres, this facility begins to take on the characteristics of a very small regional park.

Setbacks occurred at Ashley River Park during the past year. The Flood of 2015 destroyed or severely damaged all seven sections of boardwalk, totaling about 450 linear feet, in the park site. The floating dock was also swept away and has not been located. Park and recreation staff has worked with a consultant and FEMA representatives since that time to file a claim as part of the county's designation as a federal disaster area. If approved, FEMA will reimburse up to seventy-five percent of the repairs and replacement. This is known to be a protracted process.

Progress was also made at Ashley River Park since last April. Republic Contracting completed the northbound lane bridge, moved its equipment off the property, and returned the site to its previous condition. Additionally, an extensive wetland delineation process was undertaken. Protected areas related to a previous permit on the site were incorporated into the current wetland plat that was submitted to USACE. These protected areas have been signed in accordance with the deed restrictions. "New" wetland areas were also recorded on the plat and it was submitted to USACE for final approval. USACE expressed concurrence with the submission, and we expect a final Jurisdictional Determination letter any day. In January of 2016, County Council allocated \$150,000 in 2010 bond proceeds for park planning and design work. A Request for Proposals for this work will be posted in April of 2016. The goal of this RFQ will be to design the entire park in a way that amenities can be phased in based on available funding.

- Recommendation:**
- 1) Continue work to design all park phases and ensure design is consistent with an outdoor recreation and adventure theme with ample opportunities for revenue generation. Park design should make every effort to reduce future maintenance requirements and accommodate heavy use patterns.
  - 2) Allocate remaining 2010 Bond proceeds to Phase I construction.
  - 3) Determine the scope of Phase I construction based on available funding and begin construction in FY16-17.
  - 4) Utilize 2016 voter-approved bond funding to complete park construction.
  - 5) Consider locating administrative and maintenance operations facilities in park.
  - 6) Connect to Rosebrock Park via a sub-grade pedestrian crossing underneath Bacon's Bridge and a dedicated

bike/pedestrian bridge over the Ashley River. See *Trails* section above for more detailed information.

7) Work with Friends of Dorchester County Parks to secure corporate and private gifts for development of park amenities.

### **County Courthouse Park Site**

When the master plan was published in 2009, the Dorchester County Courthouse was under construction and ten acres were set aside for future park development. The *Master Plan* noted an active recreation park featuring five sports fields and multiple courts would address an underserved area of the county. Furthermore, the plan describes the site as highly developable partially owing to “limited wetlands.” At that time, “limited wetlands” was an accurate description based on the USACE-approved JD for the site. Several conceptual plans and budgets were developed for the park and County Council earmarked \$850,000 of the parks and conservation bond proceeds for the project in August 2012.

Unfortunately, the approved JD expired prior to breaking ground on the project. In the years since the original JD was approved, the USACE has trended toward a broader interpretation of jurisdictional wetlands, and the region has experienced much wetter weather than at the time the original JD was approved. Additionally, wetland mitigation costs have skyrocketed during this time period from around \$5,000/acre to \$60,000/acre. In fall of 2014, DCPRD secured a wetland assessment (less intensive than the wetland delineation survey required for an approved JD) for the property based on the firm’s recent experiences with USACE. The results indicated that large portions of each conceptual plan would be impacted by “new” wetland areas on the property. This loss of “dry” land, coupled with the exponential increase in cost since 2009 to fill and mitigate wetland areas, required that previous scope and plans for park development be revisited and altered.

Since *2015 Update* was completed, a JD has been received for this property from USACE. As anticipated, the amount of dry ground on which to construct the park was halved, resulting in a correlating reduction in space for athletic fields. The park will now feature two youth baseball fields, a multiuse field, basketball courts, a walking trail with fitness stations, and a playground. Public feedback revealed the local need for a community gathering space and water feature for cooling off in summer. An open-aired pavilion, event lawn, and interactive fountain are being incorporated into the park master plan.

As mentioned in the *2015 Update*, Dorchester County is under contract to sell a portion of the pine timber on the property now that the JD is secured. The heavy fall and winter rains prevented this from happening during that time period. The thinning operation is now scheduled for April 2016. Once completed, a topographic survey will be undertaken. With the survey in hand, permitting, master planning, and design of construction documents will

begin. All park features will be included in these activities, with the understanding that current budgetary limitations require a phasing plan to allow incremental implementation of the master plan. An RFQ process initiated in January of 2016 resulted in the selection of ADC Engineering to provide planning, design, and construction administration consultation services for this project.

***Recommendation:*** 1) Continue work to design all park phases and ensure every effort is made to reduce future maintenance requirements and accommodate heavy use patterns.

2) Determine the scope of Phase I construction based on available funding and begin construction in FY16-17. Utilize existing \$850,000 allocated for the project to leverage additional grant and governmental funding sources.

3) Utilize 2016 voter-approved bond funding to implement remaining phases of park master plan.

4) Work with Friends of Dorchester County Parks to secure corporate and private gifts for development of park amenities.

5) Due to its distance from the proposed maintenance operations base, contract with a third party to undertake general grounds maintenance at the park. Part time Park Attendants will be required to carry out tasks related to opening, closing, custodial services, and assisting with some field preparation. The future DCPRD maintenance crew will address more complex maintenance issues at the park on an as needed basis.

### **Pine Trace Natural Area**

The Pine Trace Site was purchased by Dorchester County in Summer 2011 with a combination of park and conservation bond proceeds, a new general obligation bond repaid with cable franchise fees (via the Recreation Fund), Recreation Fund reserves, and a contribution from Dorchester School District Two (SD2). The original tract totaled 331 acres and is located off of Miles Jamison Road within the jurisdictional boundary of the Town of Summerville. The county transferred 25 acres of the tract to SD2 for construction of Dr. Eugene Sires Elementary School. In November of 2013, Dorchester County entered into an agreement to sell fifty-two acres of the remaining tract to a residential developer. The hope was to generate enough revenue from the sale to retire the debt service on the

GOB, freeing up much needed annual operating funds and perhaps even capturing additional profit that could be reinvested into county park development.

This agreement hinged largely on securing an approved wetland JD. Similar to the situation at the Courthouse Park Site, the USACE-approved jurisdictional wetlands delineation for the Pine Trace Site had expired. The JD request for the entire property was managed by the developer and funded through the Dorchester County Recreation Fund. The JD request mapped wetland in a similar fashion to the expired delineation, yet added another thirty-two acres of wetland based on current experience with USACE. USACE rejected this interpretation of site conditions and called for a much greater wetland expansion, which was based largely on hydric soils found onsite. This increase resulted in the residential project becoming unprofitable, and the County released the developer from the agreement in September of 2015. No further approval action has been sought from USACE on this JD. The request to Town of Summerville to amend the Planned Unit Development Agreement to accommodate the residential development has been withdrawn.

Original conceptual plans for the Pine Trace Park Site included relatively intensive active recreational features that included eight lighted soccer fields and a BMX course. Based upon the wetland delineation proposed by the developer at the time, the *2015 Update* noted that the active features of the conceptual plan would largely have to be abandoned. Unlit multi-use meadows replaced the lighted sports fields. The BMX course once planned for this site was recommended for Eagle Run Park Site, and features such as trails, picnic shelters, and disc golf were expanded. The existing five acre pond was deemed a focal point of activity in the park with picnic structures of varying sizes and an enclosed event building recommended there. The park's vast internal trail system coupled with its natural connection to the adjacent Eagle-Chandler Trail system was to be another distinguishing park feature.

DCPRD's wetland consultant investigated the property in January of 2016 to determine if any site evidence exists to challenge the USACE claim that the majority of the county-owned property is wet. The consultant found no data that could refute USACE's stance, and suggested that the remaining areas of contiguous high ground are so isolated that installing roads to access them would be extremely costly.

Considering the challenges posed by site conditions, the highest and best use of this property is as a largely undeveloped natural area. An extensive trail system will provide the public access to this unique facility – over 300 acres of green space in a densely populated portion of Dorchester County. Extensive boardwalks will be required for some trail routes. Furthermore, this public facility will act as the northern hub for the Eagle-Chandler Trail System. Restrooms, picnic shelters, disc golf course, and a dog park are still

potential amenities. Expansive multiuse meadows are no longer practical. In partnership with the Dorchester County Conservation Commission, staff is also exploring opportunities to generate additional revenue at Pine Trace through wetlands mitigation processes managed by USACE.

The expected location of remaining dry ground will necessitate that basic vehicular access to the natural area be an extension of the school access road currently under construction, with parking situated somewhere in the vicinity of the school property. The size and exact location of these improvements (and others such as picnic shelters and restroom buildings) cannot be determined until an approved JD is secured. The lack of funding for Pine Trace development, coupled with the five year expiration period of approved JDs, suggests waiting to move forward with a JD request until funding is secured a prudent course of action at this time.

Sires Elementary School is on schedule to open in August of 2016. Construction of the school site and access infrastructure is currently underway.

***Recommendation:*** 1) Utilize 2016 voter-approved bond funding to design and construct basic infrastructure and amenities necessary to open Pine Trace Natural Area to the public.

2) Work with School District Two to explore partnership opportunities to meet school and general public needs at Pine Trace.

3) Work with Friends of Dorchester County Parks to secure corporate and private gifts for development of park amenities.



## **Other Infrastructure Projects**

### **Blueway/Water Access Development**

#### ***Ashley River***

Providing access to and encouraging recreation on waterways in Dorchester County is a recurring theme in the *Parks and Recreation Master Plan*. Blueway or blue trail development is a rapidly growing outdoor recreation trend and one that has seen some recent momentum in the county.

Nonprofit organization American Rivers (AR), the preeminent nationwide blue trails leader, chose the Ashley River its newest project and employed a local, part-time staff person to support the effort. The Ashley River Blue Trail was formally launched with a November 2015 celebration and printing of 2,500 waterproof padding maps for distribution to the general public. DCPRD facilitated a public/private partnership with the new Summers Corner community that will covered two-thirds of the cost of the initial and future map printings. The remaining costs are funded through a South Carolina Sea Grant Consortium grant. Another printing of 2,500 maps will occur after the Swan Drive and Bacon's Bridge access sites are developed and open to the public.

As discussed in greater detail under the Ashley River Park Site section of this plan, waterway access is critical to ARP's future role as hub of blue trail activity. Plans for river access have been part of all concepts for the future park, and this access point, referred to as the Bacon's Bridge Access Site, is a project being pursued independently from ARP development. Funding in the amount of \$250,000 (\$100,000 from SCDNR; \$100,000 from National Heritage Corridor; \$50,000 from 2010 Bond) has been secured to install a basic parking area and carry down launch site adjacent to the bridge. Somewhat extensive boardwalk and an engineered launch structure will be required to comply with 2010 ADA standards. Wetland work and State Historic Preservation Office concurrence has been completed.

The Sland's Bridge location is a critical access point for the upper reaches of the Ashley River Blue Trail. In addition to creating an upstream launch site for day trips ending at Ashley River Park, it also provides manageable access to Schultz Lake, the official start of the blue trail located two miles upstream. Funding in the amount of \$200,000 (\$100,000 from SCDNR; \$50,000 from SCDHEC-OCRM; \$50,000 from 2010 Bond) has been secured to install a basic parking area and carry down launch site. This small parcel is currently owned by Dorchester County. Somewhat extensive boardwalk and an engineered launch structure will be required to comply with 2010 ADA standards. A very difficult boundary survey has just been completed and recorded, and a wetland JD request is pending with USACE. Services for obtaining SHPO concurrence will be sought in April of 2015. A Request for Qualifications for Design Services for both of these two critical sites will be initiated in April of 2015 as well.

- Recommendation:**
- 1) Continue regulatory and planning work required to initiate design work at the final two Ashley River Blue Trail Access Sites.
  - 2) Secure a firm through an RFQ process to design access sites, obtain related permits, and administer construction in FY16.
  - 3) Complete design and construct access sites in FY17.

### ***Edisto River***

The Dorchester County portion of the Edisto River is on the opposite end of the spectrum of blue trail development from the Ashley River. For several decades, this stretch of blackwater river has been marketed as the Edisto River Canoe and Kayak Trail by Colleton County's Edisto River Canoe and Kayak Commission (ERCK). Many public and private access sites of varying quality and utility exist. Paddlers, tubers, fishermen, hunters, and even water skiers recreate in this river corridor. Two thriving SC State Parks, Givhans Ferry and Colleton, are located on this strategic segment of the Edisto. While the Edisto is the shared border of Colleton and Dorchester Counties, Dorchester County has largely been uninvolved with the management and promotion of this outstanding recreational resource.

In an effort to become more involved with the Edisto, better understand its recreational value, and hopefully improve the quality of the resource for recreational pursuits, DCPRD staff applied for and was awarded a grant from the National Park Service's Recreation, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program. This award provides NPS staff support and technical assistance for development of a Recreation Management Plan for the Edisto River. To support plan development, DCPRD staff secured \$3,000 in county Accommodations Tax proceeds and department operations savings to fund an intern stipend. As part of graduate work for the University of South Carolina, Kimberly Noonan is undertaking an internship that will consist of developing and presenting the Edisto River Management Plan.

A scoping meeting with key stakeholders was held in February of 2016 and resulted in a plan scope that will document issues related to recreational infrastructure, litter, user conflicts, safety of recreational users, the need for an intercounty advocacy organization, and the dissemination of information regarding river recreation. Where relevant, recommendations will be made for addressing issues that might degrade the recreational experience on the Edisto River. The Edisto River Recreation Management Plan is scheduled to be completed and presented to the public in December of 2016.

- Recommendation:**
- 1) Continue to assist intern with Recreation Management Plan Development.

2) Focus on developing an intercounty Edisto River Canoe and Kayak Commission, replacement organization, or counterpart organization in Dorchester County as recommended by the plan. This group or groups will be essential to championing the implementation of plan recommendations for improving recreation on the Edisto River.

**Rosebrock Park** *(Note: This facility is referred to as “Ashley River Site” in the original master plan, which should not to be confused with the Ashley River Park Site that is covered below.)*

In 2011 Dorchester County opened and began operation of its only public park, Richard H. Rosebrock Park, which is located at the intersection of Bacon’s Bridge Road and the Scenic Ashley River. The county entered into a lease agreement for two adjacent parcels totaling 70 acres for the provision of passive recreation to the public. The smaller of the two parcels is ten acres and leased from the Commission of Public Works of the City of Charleston through May of 2037. The larger parcel of sixty acres is owned by Dorchester Trust Foundation (DTF) and is use restricted for passive recreation. The county entered into a lease agreement with DTF through 2110. The agreement also places restrictions on tree removal and limits the number of fishing docks installed on the property to one (currently no fishing docks exist).

Rosebrock Park is best classified as a natural area. Vast wetland areas, mature floodplain forest, and the Ashley River are the primary features of this property. The park features an access road, parking area, outdoor classroom, picnic shelters, and 1.5 miles of trails. Signage, benches, boardwalks and bridges were also installed along the trail route, and portable restrooms are provided in the parking area.

Since DCPRD hired its first staff member in September of 2014, incremental improvement efforts have been undertaken to improve the overall quality of Rosebrock Park. Volunteer efforts having included planting of a vegetative buffer between the trail head and highways as well as ongoing trail maintenance that aims to make the trail surface passable more days of the year.

In December of 2014, DCPRD was awarded a Community Pride Grant from Palmetto Pride to design, fabricate, and install eleven trailside interpretive panels that provide an educational tour highlighting the property’s many historical, science, and conservation themes. All eleven panels were installed in March of 2016. The goal of this project is to increase park usage by providing a new amenity – an educational tool conducive to experiential education.

Also in March of 2016, information on general park signage was updated and replaced. An accurate color coded trail map with QR code link to a smart phone digital map was installed

at the kiosk. Correlating color coded trail markers were posted at the same time. Park rules and hours (now dawn to dusk) were also updated and posted at this time.

A major goal for improving the quality of Rosebrock Park is to revamp the trailhead facilities. The list of desired improvements to this point include constructing a permanent restroom facility, grassing and landscaping approximately one third of the existing parking area, moving the park sign to the corner of the intersection, and rerouting the trailhead to make the park more accessible for all users. Staff believes these trailhead enhancements will attract more users the facility for picnics, field trips, and other group outings. An application for \$100,000 in Recreational Trails Program funding is currently pending for the improvements mentioned above.

The winter and early spring months pose a major accessibility issue to Rosebrock Park trail users. Low areas become muddy barriers to enjoying the full extent of the trail system, especially as you near the Ashley Scenic River. Staff is assisting a local Eagle Scout candidate with developing a plan to reroute portions of the trail and to install boardwalk at other trail trouble spots. The Town of Summerville Parks and Recreation Department donated lightly used, treated lumber that will help to make this project a success.

- Recommendation:***
- 1) Replace portable restrooms with a permanent restroom facility. A basic, traditional park restroom will encourage and support greater park usage, especially by school and youth groups, and will be consistent in quality with the facilities envisioned for the Ashley River Park Site.
  - 2) Connect Rosebrock Park to future Ashley River Park via a sub-grade pedestrian crossing underneath Bacon's Bridge. Using a non-signalized crosswalk to negotiate four lanes of traffic on a heavily utilized highway would be undesirable for most park users and viewed by most motorists as a major inconvenience. A seamless link between Ashley River Park and Rosebrock Park is essential to maximizing the utility of each individual park.
  - 3) Monitor funding opportunities for "Pond Loop" trail construction. Though the berm surrounding the pond is high ground, accessing this area requires traversing extensive wetlands, and will require significant stretches of boardwalk greatly increasing the cost of this loop.

- 4) Continue to utilize volunteer labor to improve the quality of the trails through rerouting, maintaining existing drainages, applying natural material to the trail surface, and constructing boardwalks.

### **Bridlewood Farms Park Site**

The Bridlewood Farms Park Site is one that was on the radar when the master plan was published in 2009, and not much has changed since then. The developer of the Bridlewood Farms subdivision donated thirty-six acres to Dorchester County for development of a public park and school site. This property is located in a rural yet growing area of the county located off Carter Road between Ridgeville and the Givhans community. The master plan noted in 2009 that due to a relative lack of wetlands and flat topography, Bridlewood Farms “is an ideal site for the development of an active recreation park.” Since that time, plans for the school have been moved to the backburner, and no effort has been made to install a public park facility on the site. Boundaries have been drawn between county and school properties. Working together to best located park features and school facilities will benefit all.

The envisioned community park was a major point of contention during the public feedback process that followed the *2015 Update*. The Ridgeville meeting, which was the best attended of all the public forums, was highlighted by negative comments from nearly all that chose to speak. Comments from the survey instrument echoed this trend. Two major perceived problems with the park were voiced – both related to location. Many felt the location, four miles removed from downtown Ridgeville, would prove to be too far from this population center. Residents of the adjacent Bridlewood Farms subdivision espoused a different message – “not in my back yard.” These residents argued that most of the public outside of Bridlewood Farms would utilize their neighborhood as a “shortcut” to access the park from Highway 27 instead of utilizing Carter Road. This additional neighborhood traffic was viewed as a serious issue among residents.

Some survey comments were positive regarding the park, but even those respondents felt the focus on athletic fields and courts was too strong. More multiuse features such as a spray fountain, playground, and multiple picnic shelters were desired.

***Recommendation:*** 1) When School District Two is ready to move forward with planning, coordinate with SD2 to determine location of school and park infrastructure.

2) Work with SD2 and Bridlewood Farms representatives to address access concerns.

### **Eagle Run Park Site**

Located less than a mile from the Pine Trace Park Site, the Eagle Run Site is a 54 acre county-owned property that the *2009 Master Plan* describes as having “little opportunity to be developed as an efficient active recreation park” due to limiting factors such as a high proportion of wetlands and limited vehicular access. The *2009 Master Plan* estimated over half of the site contains delineated wetlands leaving around twenty-two acres of developable land. It is important to note here that wetlands have been interpreted much more broadly by USACE since 2009 as evidenced by recent delineation work at Pine Trace, Courthouse Park, and Ashley River Park.

The *2015 Update* noted that the opening of the new Wallace Ackerman Drive, which runs adjacent to the northeastern property line, would “generate greatly enhanced vehicular access by providing a direct outlet from the park to both Ladson and Dorchester Roads.” Since that time, the DCPRD wetland consultant performed a basic wetland assessment of the property. Their findings do not bode well for plans to providing vehicular access to the property. The consultant estimates well under 10 acres of dry ground on the property. Unfortunately, this high ground is situated in the middle of the property and is a de facto island surrounded by wetlands. Constructing a road through the wetlands between Wallace Ackerman Drive and the dry ground would result in major wetland impacts and costly mitigation. Due to such limited access and lack of dry ground, the BMX park discussed in the *2015 Update* is no longer advised.

Though Eagle Run may not be suitable as a “park and enjoy” facility, its location is important for Eagle-Chandler Trail Phase III development. It comprises over half of this proposed section. Additionally, Wallace Ackerman Drive features a heavily used multiuse path. Eagle-Chandler Trail Phase III will connect to this path through the property. The high ground in the middle of the site could offer an opportunity for side trails and a skills course, providing a more challenging experience for advanced biking and running enthusiasts. Furthermore, the Eagle Run site presents an easy method for connecting the two large neighborhoods to the trail network. Lastly, as with Pine Trace, staff continues to explore the potential of this site for revenue generation through mitigation agreements approved by USACE.

- Recommendation:**
- 1) Focus future planning and design efforts on connecting adjacent communities to the Eagle-Chandler Trail system.
  - 2) Explore ideas for utilizing this space as a low impact biking facility.

**Woodland Park Site** *(Note: This project is highly conceptual having only been discussed at the staff level. Any future agreement regarding this project would require the formal approval of the Dorchester School District Four Board in addition to Dorchester County Council.)*

The Woodland Park Site is a relatively new opportunity first introduced in the *2015 Update*. Representatives from Woodland High School, Dorchester School District Four, and DCPRD staff brainstormed ideas for providing public sports facilities on currently vacant land at the Woodland High School site. It is not yet clear when the public demand for such a facility might arise.

Six grassy acres east of the existing football field is rectangular in shape and has been the primary focus of discussions so far. It appears the area could accommodate one baseball field, one softball/little league field, and one multi-use field. Currently this space is utilized as overflow practice space for WHS and middle school sports. GIS data and current site conditions suggest wetlands are not present in this area. There is also land available for construction of basketball courts between the main school building and Highway 78.

Existing infrastructure adjacent to the six acre space includes utilities, vehicular access, and parking. The existing parking area would need to be expanded from its current 0.2 acres to the full 1 acre available to be able to better accommodate facility users. Additionally, the primary school parking area could be utilized as 0.2 miles of existing sidewalk would connect users to the new facilities. Mobile classrooms, currently unused, are located between the smaller parking area and the proposed athletic field area. According to SD4 staff, these buildings could easily be relocated. A restroom facility and perhaps even a small playground would fit nicely into this space.

There are a couple of major benefits related to this Woodland Park concept. The issue of maintaining recreational facilities in a part of the county separated from the major population center could be addressed through a partnership with SD4. Obviously, SD4 maintains its existing athletic fields on, and could potentially expand its operation to include the new athletic fields. Additionally, the site's central location in western Dorchester County is best situated to serve a dispersed rural population.

Undoubtedly, this idea is in the very early conceptual stages. Should this idea continue to move forward, a partnership agreement would be required that would detail each organization's contribution to facility development and maintenance. The agreement would also govern scheduling issues regarding public versus school use of shared facilities.

***Recommendation:*** 1) Monitor demand for expanded athletic facilities at this location.

- 2) Communicate at least annually with SD4 officials regarding partnership opportunities.

### **Western County Pool**

Provision of some sort of aquatic facility to serve western county residents was not a concept included in either of the previous master plan versions. During the public feedback process in 2015, the need for a basic outdoor pool facility in this region was voiced during the public forums, in the survey, and with follow up inquiries by Park and Recreation Commissioners residing in this area.

While some residents do seek a place to cool off and recreate during hot summer months, the primary demand for a pool is related to the need to teach basic swimming and life saving techniques to area youth. No such public facility currently exists in western Dorchester County.

The basic facility envisioned is a standard outdoor pool with six, twenty-five meter lanes and an adjacent, shallow, zero entry pool for non-swimmers. Designing and constructing such a facility is not an overly costly endeavor. However, operation and maintenance of such a facility present significant financial challenges. The primary obstacles are related to risk management and staffing. Understandably, a pool operator is required to have many trained lifeguard eyes on the water at all times. Furthermore, during hot summer days it is important to rotate staff on and off shifts to maintain alertness and stamina. Being able to find and train enough qualified lifeguards in this part of the county is a concern as well. These personnel costs, not to mention those associated with chemical and other supplies, make it very challenging to avoid significant operating deficits at these facilities. Considering the general need to keep recurring annual costs of the young Parks and Recreation Department to a minimum, the pool project was not included in the top priority tier. A strong partner will be needed to address challenges related to operations and maintenance of a pool facility. Ideas include other operators in nearby areas such as Orangeburg and Summerville YMCAs.

- Recommendation:**
- 1) Continue discussions with YMCA pool operators in nearby communities to determine if/when interest exists in a pool facility partnership.
  - 2) Further research mobile pool operations, such as the one in Charleston County, for meeting interim basic swimming lesson needs.



### **Rural Community Parks**

Rural community parks have played a vital role in providing recreation opportunities for isolated communities throughout Dorchester County. These parks include: Givhans Community Park, Sand Hill Community Park, Shady Grove Community Park, St. Mark's Community Park, St. Paul Community Park, and Texas Community Park. As mentioned in the "Recreation Outreach Grants" update below, these facilities appear to be most impacted by the shift in policy that saw a postponement of the grant program in favor of shifting funding toward county-led recreation endeavors. Collecting usage information for some of the community parks has proven challenging, and staff has relied somewhat on visual inspection as well as word of mouth to determine the condition and use characteristics of some facilities. Some community parks that have received outreach grants in the past include:

***Givhans Community Park*** – Located off Givhans Road between Ridgeville and Givhans, this park features an unlit baseball field with backstop and foul line fencing, a community gathering building with restrooms, picnic shelter, basketball court, and minimal playground equipment. Eyewitness accounts note that the level of ball field use for practices and local games has decreased in the last few years, and a visual inspection suggests the existence of multiple maintenance issues.

***Sand Hill Community Park*** – Located at the intersection of Clubhouse Road and Summers Drive in southern Dorchester County, this park features an unlit baseball field with backstop and foul line fencing as well as a restroom/concession building. The ball field is utilized primarily by a travel baseball team for practice during the week and by adult men's and women's softball teams on the weekends. These users "pass the hat" to cover mowing expenses, and the travel baseball team maintains the skinned portions of the infield. Sand Hill Community Park is one of the better maintained parks community parks in Dorchester County. An involved volunteer group undertakes community festivals generating some funds that are put back into the park. This group has expressed a desire to install modern playground equipment and picnic shelters in order to serve other community recreation needs.

***Shady Grove Community Park*** – Located less than a half mile from the Orangeburg County line off of Highway 178, this park features an unlit baseball field with backstop and foul line fencing along the infield, a restroom building, and several picnic shelters. It appears this site is used for practices, informal games, and community cookouts. While the ball field grass seems to be maintained, other areas of the park are overgrown, and the "skinned" infield is almost completely overrun by grass.

***St. Mark's Community Park*** – Located adjacent to the vacant St. Mark's Church building off of St. Mark Bowman Road west of Interstate I-95, this park features a very basic baseball

field and a shelter. The field area consists of a backstop on roughly cleared land. Visual inspection suggests this facility is rarely used and has not been maintained regularly in recent years.

***St. Paul Community Park*** – Located just over a mile southwest of Harleyville, this park features an unlit baseball field with backstop and foul line fencing, a playground, basketball court, restrooms, concession building with attached shelter, and other park amenities such as picnic tables and swings. Park volunteers work to host weekend softball games, practices, and fundraising events, and offer rentals for group events that help to cover operating costs. St. Paul Park is one of the better maintained community parks in the county, but keeping up with the large amount of grass requiring mowing remains an ongoing challenge.

***Texas Community Park*** – Located approximately 3.5 miles southeast of St. George, this park features an unlit baseball field with backstop and outfield fencing, picnic shelters, building with restrooms and meeting space, paved walking loop, basketball court, restrooms, and swing sets. In addition to accommodating practices and weekend softball games, this park also hosts community events and a Summer Feeding Program for youth. It has hosted summer camps in the past as well. Texas Community Park is one of the better maintained community parks in the county, but keeping up with the large amount of grass requiring mowing remains an ongoing challenge.

***Recommendation:*** 1) Reintegrate these parks into the Recreation Outreach Grant program once it is reinstated. Develop selection process criteria that reward those parks/groups that demonstrate maintenance capacity and higher levels of use.

2) Assist volunteer groups that manage these parks with grant pursuits as staff capacity allows.

3) Include some community parks in a landscaping contract for the western part of the County. The Colleton County model shows that contracting out mowing, edging, and turf applications for dispersed rural parks can be more economical than undertaking these maintenance activities in-house. Inclusion of such parks in a maintenance plan would require the managing organization to demonstrate service provision to the community at large, to ensure the park is open to the general public during daylight hours, to relinquish some control over facility scheduling and fee structure to DCPRD,

and to exhibit revenue generation activities and/or in-kind services to support park improvement and operation.

4) Provide in-house, seasonal maintenance of infields in order to maintain their “skinned” characteristic as capacity allows.

- **Plan and begin development of a countywide regional park**

The county currently does not own a suitable site for a regional park, which requires a site with a bare minimum of 200 acres (and up to 1000ac) with opportunities for both heavy active and passive use. Land acquisition and park development efforts have been focused on property that according to the master plan classification system would currently be appropriate as community parks, neighborhood parks, natural resource areas, and/or special use parks. The Parks and Recreation Commission at this time is philosophically opposed to committing funds toward the acquisition of the land suited to host a regional park.

***Recommendation:*** 1) Pursue other park facility development efforts as recommended above while staying abreast of land acquisition opportunities for a park of this size, as well as partnership opportunities for development and maintenance.

- **Facility Partnerships**

Partnerships between public agencies (and to a lesser degree public-private arrangements) have proven to be an effective cost sharing method for the provision of recreation facilities in some communities. A typical arrangement is for one agency to fund construction of a facility and contribute to ongoing maintenance costs while a partner agency operates and programs the facility. Another common partnership is for a public recreation agency to contribute to construction, maintenance, and/or operating costs of school district facilities such as gyms, tracks, playgrounds, and athletic fields in exchange for general public access to these resources.

While the Woodland Park idea is well covered above, staff has also met with SD2 officials in recent months regarding opportunities for development of land that could be utilized for both public education and public recreation pursuits. One such project is Bridlewood Farms that is discussed above. Other partnerships with SD2 are in the earliest stages of vetting, and officials anticipate working with the School Board to develop a facilities plan for the coming years. This plan will further help to guide partnership opportunities with SD2.

**Recommendation:** 1) Continue to communicate and to work with SD2 and SD4 officials to develop medium and long range plans to incorporate public recreation opportunities into existing and future school facilities.

2) While operating and maintaining community recreation centers is traditionally a costly parks and recreation endeavor, Dorchester County is severely lacking in these facilities outside of the membership-based Summerville YMCA facilities. During the next few years, DCPRD should cultivate dialogue focused on recreation center partnership opportunities with SD2, SD4, and the Town of Summerville. A potential arrangement might see shared use of a school district gym with an on-site community center that is able to be isolated from campus during school hours. Operating and maintenance costs could be shared by multiple partners. The Town of Summerville's participation in such a project is likely some years away as it is currently planning for the development of a community center at the former National Guard Armory building adjacent to Doty Park.

3) Like DCPRD, the Town of Summerville recognizes that the high demand for athletic fields and related facilities is not currently being met and that the gap will continue to widen should recent county population trends continue. A large, athletic complex featuring numerous and varied sports fields would go far in meeting the demand. Sharing the costs of constructing and operating such a facility could be a way to move an ambitious project like this forward. Staff from both agencies should begin discussing the feasibility of this idea over the next several years. Discussions should focus on what a partnership arrangement might consist of, as well as the identification of a suitable location for what would be a large, high use complex. Suitable locations for such a complex should also be monitored for acquisition opportunities in the medium to long term.

## Other Projects

### **Recreation Outreach Grants**

Traditionally, the main thrust of Dorchester County's parks and recreation endeavors came in the form of financial assistance to municipalities, community groups, and other organizations for the provision of a variety of recreational offerings to county residents. These grants were funded through a combination of Parks and Recreation Development (PARAD) Grants, general fund allocations, and designated Recreation Fund revenues. The *2009 Master Plan* labeled this assistance Recreation Outreach Grants and recommended the continuation of this program. Assistance levels increased steadily from 2006, peaking in 2009 with a total of \$302,589 transferred that year. However, transfers to outside organizations declined significantly each year after 2009 to a low of \$0 in 2013. The downward trend is explained by a shift in policy in which Dorchester County focused on building an independent parks and recreation capacity – primarily through park land acquisition, development of Rosebrock Park, and the hiring of the Parks and Recreation Department's first staff member.

Many of the outreach grant recipients were highly reliant on this stream of assistance not only for development of new amenities but also for maintaining the quality of those amenities already in place. As a result, it appears that levels of maintenance and level of activity have decreased somewhat in correlation with the decrease in funding. Some of the county's smaller municipalities that provide recreation services to county residents residing both within and outside the town limits have reiterated the need to reinstitute the Recreation Outreach Grant Program. Additionally, an update on each of the "Rural Community Parks," which seem to be the most negatively impacted by the postponement of the Recreation Outreach Grant program has already been discussed above.

- Recommendation:***
- 1) Reinstitute the Recreation Outreach Grant Program as part of the first significant increase in allocation to the Parks and Recreation Fund.
  - 2) Develop a standard application, review, and reporting process to ensure efficient use of funds.
  - 3) The selection process should be competitive with scoring criteria developed with input from the Parks and Recreation Commission. Scoring should favor those organizations that demonstrate ability to commit matching funds or in-kind labor.

### **Recreation Information Center**

Surveys conducted as part of the *2009 Master Plan* information gathering effort revealed that nearly a third of respondents did not know whether or not their city or town offered recreational services. Furthermore, open house attendees were surprised to learn about many existing recreational facilities located throughout the county. Due to Dorchester County's relatively large jurisdictional boundary, it is logical that the county should take the lead in organizing and disseminating recreational information to residents in order to help ensure existing opportunities are fully utilized.

Some progress has been made on this recommendation. The Parks and Recreation Department section of the Dorchester County website provides information on some facilities and activities offered by partner recreation providers in the county. However, the listings found here are far from comprehensive. Gathering, organizing, and including this information on the website is tedious and time consuming. Incremental improvements have been made by staff to keep the webpage current and useful, but the larger Recreation Information Center effort has not started in earnest. Additional staff assistance is needed to complete this effort. In addition to the webpage, Dorchester County Parks and Recreation Department utilizes the social media platform of Facebook in order to update interested individuals on DCPRD progress and partner recreation opportunities. A quarterly newsletter, another recommendation of the master plan, has not been developed as there is not enough content on offer to fill a newsletter.

- Recommendation:***
- 1) Continue collection of data and reorganization of existing DCPRD webpage to better serve as a complete recreation directory for users. Developing and posting on the website a standard form that interested parties may complete to transmit pertinent information is recommended.
  - 2) Produce and distribute an annual print Directory for recreation facilities and services. Eventually, this should transform into a seasonal newsletter.
  - 3) If no additional administrative staff is available in the near future, utilize a student intern for further development and maintenance of the Recreation Information Center.

### **Friends of Dorchester County Parks**

Assisting the development of a park friends group was noted in the *2009 Master Plan* and was quickly recognized by both staff and the Dorchester County PRC as a high priority. County Council voted in April of 2015 to permit staff to coordinate the creation of such a group and provided direct assistance in the amount of \$3,000 from the Recreation Fund

Balance to jumpstart the organization. Friends groups support governmental park and recreation efforts through contributing valuable time, expertise, and privately-raised funds. As champions of parks, friends groups frequently engage area communities in the park system and provide financial support and volunteer time in support of park priorities. An adequate level of staff support is typically important to the operation of a successful Friends Group.

Friends of Dorchester County Parks received exempt status from the IRS in January as a charitable organization for which 100% of donations are deductible as allowed for in IRS Code Section 501(c)(3). This designation really set the wheels in motion. Since then, the Friends Board of Directors has been filled with five of eleven available positions. This core group with staff support from DCPRD has coalesced around a launch event and seminal fundraising effort scheduled for April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2015. Press releases and a volunteer drive will accompany this event. Proceeds will be utilized to establish the organization on better footing for operating during the coming years. A website and various social media accounts have been launched.

- Recommendation:***
- 1) Capitalize on first fundraiser and launch event with media coverage
  - 2) Fill all eleven Friends of Dorchester County Park Board of Directors slots.
  - 3) Undertake strategic planning for the group to focus fundraising and volunteer efforts on specific projects. Adopt at least one specific fundraising target for both Ashley River Park and Courthouse Park.
  - 4) Assign development and support of the friends group as a primary responsibility of the Marketing and Development Manager once hired. This staff person will work hand in hand with volunteers (and any parks group staff) on fundraising and park enhancement projects that will supplement the core recreation infrastructure of the envisioned park system.

### **Programming Partnerships**

The *2009 Master Plan* recommends the newly formed DCPRD “delay directly offering recreation programs until further into the department’s existence,” recognizing that facility development efforts will “require much of the department’s attention, efforts, and budget” during its first five years. Rather than directly offering new programming, the plan calls for a focus on notifying residents of existing programming through the Recreation Information

Center (discussed above), and partnering with existing public and private recreation providers to provide a basic level of fee-based programming.

**Recommendation:** 1) Continue to develop opportunities to support existing programs in the county through Recreation Outreach Grants and development of the Recreation Information Center. These efforts will help to both increase the quality and capacity of existing programs as well as ensure that residents are aware of program opportunities. As noted in the plan, this approach will help DCPRD to avoid an overwhelming increase in personnel costs.

2) Work with other public agencies (SCDNR, Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service, etc.) and volunteer organizations (scouting groups, SC Master Naturalists, Audubon Society, etc.) to provide near term, basic environmental and nature-based programming for Rosebrock Park.

3) Once opened, secure arrangements for public/private programming partnerships for Ashley River Park and county blueways. Such programming should be user fee supported under a model in which a percentage of contractor revenues are shared with DCPRD in exchange for providing a venue with a captive audience. Potential offerings should include but not necessarily be limited to: ropes course experiences, yoga and other outdoor exercise classes, youth day camps, and canoe, kayak, and stand up paddleboard instruction, outings, and rentals.

4) On or around FY19-20, DCPRD staff should revisit this model of partner/contractor provided programming. Careful analysis will determine whether a continuation of the existing model or a model in which programming is offered on a more “in-house” basis is more advantageous to both participants and DCPRD.

5) A strong network of volunteer youth sports and athletic organizations exists in Dorchester County. Rather than attempt to duplicate these successful programs, DCPRD should work with these organizations to provide and maintain



adequate practice and game facilities for use by these leagues, as well as to promote these opportunities through the Recreation Information Center. There could be some isolated areas of the county in which residents do not have access to local youth sports opportunities. In such instances, DCPRD should work with these communities to develop such opportunities as staff capacity allows on a case by case basis.

6) Special events such as races, competitions, and festivals hold additional opportunity to program DCPRD facilities and generate revenue for the department. Initially, it may be more advantageous to offer facility “rentals” to outside organizations seeking to hold special events on DCPRD property. Specific policies and procedures must be drafted and adopted prior to entering into such arrangements. As DCPRD staff and volunteer (Friends Group) capacity grows, in-house provision of regularly scheduled park events should increase.

### **Conservation Projects**

Many park and recreation agencies are actively involved in local efforts to conserve land for the benefit of the public. Oftentimes, land conservation goals and public recreation goals can be reached on the same property. Typically in these instances, basic public access is provided on conserved lands in the form of trailheads, trails, and other low impact recreation programs. Rosebrock Park is a prime local example of a conserved land that provides public recreation as a natural resource area.

Dorchester County’s conservation efforts to this point have been led by the Conservation Commission, which was established in 2003. The in September of 2015, the Director of Parks and Recreation was instructed to serve as staff support to the Conservation Commission. This has improved communication and partnership efforts between the Parks and Recreation and Conservation Commissions. Conservation Commission efforts have primarily been funded through the aforementioned 2010 Bond Issue. Of \$500,000 allocated for conservation easements, over half of that amount is unspent. A challenge with this funding source is that bond terms require the funds be expended by a certain date to avoid financial costs to the County in the form of arbitrage.

***Recommendation:*** 1) Provide staff support to the Conservation Commission as requested and as capacity allows.

2) Work to identify projects that meet both conservation and recreation goals.

3) Allocate an annual DCPRD funding to county Conservation Commission projects. Being able to depend on a minimum recurring funding allocation will allow the Conservation Commission to undertake its work with more certainty and on its own schedule. A dedicated annual allocation also demonstrates Dorchester County's long term commitment to conserve lands for public benefit. Unspent funds should be carried over in the conservation fund balance that could be utilized during future years of high conservation activity or for protection of large tracts.

4) Work with the Commission to identify and maintain an inventory of desirable and available tracts in Dorchester County that could be provided to the USACE as potential mitigation pieces.

- **Trails/Greenways Master Plan** – Community input in the original master planning process and subsequent update demonstrated a high demand among residents for improved and expanded walking and biking infrastructure for both connectivity and recreational purposes. The master plan recommends creating a countywide greenway master plan to prioritize and guide related development. Finally, this effort has been initiated. With input from DCPRD staff, Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments staff selected and contracted with nationally acclaimed Alta Planning to develop a Bike and Pedestrian Master Plan for the entire Tri-County region. This plan will identify opportunities for expanded connectivity throughout all of Dorchester County and more importantly, provide an independent analysis and prioritization of these routes and connections. BCD COG anticipates completing its Bike and Pedestrian Master Plan in December of 2016.

**Recommendation:** 1) Work with Alta Planning and BCD COG to ensure accurate information and stakeholder feedback is incorporated into the Dorchester County portion of the Bike and Pedestrian Master Plan.

## **Parks and Recreation Staffing**

### ***2009 Master Plan***

The *2009 Master Plan* described a strategy for the vitally important task of assembling a professional staff to lead department efforts. In year one, the plan recommended hiring a Director and an Administrative Assistant. The plan then called for hiring a Revenue Specialist on the assumption that the “need for funding” will dominate DCPRD activity for the next one to two years. Once park design and construction projects accelerate, the plan recommends adding a Park Planner to staff. Lastly, the master plan mentions that a very small maintenance crew might be required depending upon a number of factors. The Director and only current DCPRD employee, was hired in September of 2014, which was five years after the original recommendation.

### ***2015 Update***

This update stressed that the staffing plan described in the master plan is based on a far less aggressive approach to park development than the *2015 Update* envisioned. Therefore, a larger and more rapid staffing buildup was outlined. Some position titles were changed to better reflect the personnel needs. Key positions (in order of on boarding) included a Director, Administrative Assistant, Marketing and Development Manager, Project Manager, Park Maintenance Crew (5 positions), Part Time Park Attendants, Park Manager, Assistant Park Manager, and Recreation Coordinator. This staffing plan was designed to meet the requirements of designing, constructing, and operating the recommended facilities in the *2015 Update*.

### ***2016 Update***

As covered extensively above, a year’s worth of new information has significantly altered the characteristics of the county park systems initial wave of development. Overall, parks that would have been more active and thus requiring more maintenance and staff support (Pine Trace and Eagle Run) will now be developed largely as natural areas. Development of other park sites (Bridlewood Farms and Woodland HS) was not included in the Commission’s recommendation for bond funding and will be revisited at a later date in conjunction with the local school districts. Several trails projects did make the cut, but will require fewer resources to maintain than the more active parks that were in the *2015 Update’s* recommendation for bond funding. As a result, the staffing plan has been trimmed. It should be noted that final park design and changes in development schedules could impact staffing levels and timing of adding positions.

***Recommendation:*** 1) **Administrative Assistant** – An Administrative Assistant is quickly becoming a necessity. Assistance is needed with day to day administrative, procurement, reporting, and customer service tasks in order to allow the Director to give greater

focus to department and facility development. This assistance will become even more necessary as design begins on the first major park facility projects. An Administrative Assistant will be heavily utilized once on board.

**2) Marketing and Development Manager** – Identifying and securing funding will be a primary task for the new department as noted in the master plan. However, the current Director has considerable experience in this area and will continue to be involved in these efforts to a degree that will not initially require a full time staff member dedicated solely to revenue development.

Marketing endeavors will be important to establishing the department early on. Special events will also be a useful tool for both revenue development and marketing during these early stages. Additionally, supporting a park friends group's fundraising and service efforts will be an important responsibility of DCPRD staff. Therefore, the next position DCPRD should fill is Marketing and Development Manager. The ideal candidate will have experience in securing private gifts/sponsorships for public projects, special event management, volunteer recruitment and management, and a wide range of marketing functions. This position should be filled in FY17-18, as Ashley River Park and the Courthouse Park open.

**3) Project Manager** (removed from plan) – The *2009 Master Plan* noted the need to add a Park Planner to staff as facility development project activities increase. The *2015 Update* replaced this position with a Project Manager since it was deemed a more accurate title for the requirements of this position. This recommendation was based upon the idea that multiple, simultaneous park development projects would be beyond the capacity of the Director to manage. As noted, the *2015 Update* recommends a less aggressive approach to large, active park development projects. With adequate support from the Administrative Assistant, Marketing and Development Coordinator, and contracted consultants, the Director will have the capacity to act as project manager, and

the Project Manager position has been removed from the recommendation.

**4) Maintenance Crew** – The *2009 Master Plan* provided little guidance on how the proposed facilities should be maintained. In order to ensure a high level of responsiveness and to operate safe parks for public use, it is highly recommended that a small parks maintenance crew be established prior to the opening of the first park facility. This crew should grow incrementally as maintenance operations expand. Initially, a two person crew consisting of a Park Maintenance Supervisor and a Park Maintenance Worker should be created to undertake maintenance and custodial tasks as the initial wave of facilities (Ashley River Park, Courthouse Park, and river access sites) come online. The Park Maintenance Supervisor would need to be hired well in advance of initiating departmental maintenance operations in order to procure necessary tools and supplies as well as to further refine the park maintenance plan. These maintenance crew startup costs are included in capital expenses below. Additional maintenance workers will be phased in as demanded by the workload, and will peak at four total positions once all bonded projects are fully built and operating at capacity. These staff additions will be revisited and potentially revised once operations are underway, and may be affected by changes in park development schedules and development plans.

It is very important to note here that such a relatively small maintenance staff is based on the intent to contract out most regular mowing, edging, and turf care tasks. This trend is growing in park and recreation departments nationally as it is increasingly seen as a more efficient service delivery option than maintaining the expensive equipment and additional staff in house. The dispersed nature of county park facilities further lend support to this model by reducing fuel costs and avoiding “windshield” time.

It is expected that at least initially, the parks maintenance crew should have some additional capacity for special projects, especially during the dormant season. During these “down” times, this crew will undertake park enhancement projects

such as landscaping/planting tasks, amenity installation, equipment maintenance, and deep cleaning tasks. A Service Delivery Model based on accepted industry standards for level of service was utilized for estimating the need for three FTE positions to maintain the recreational facilities that are anticipated to open in FY17-18. Empirical data, based on staff experiences overseeing maintenance and custodial operations at other local park facilities, was also incorporated into this process.

5) **Part-time Park Attendants** – Once opened, Ashley River Park will require constant staff presence to collect admission fees. Hiring a pool of part-time Park Attendants is the recommended model for providing this coverage. In addition to running the gate, Park Attendant tasks will also include: opening and closing, custodial/cleaning, stocking, customer service (as this park will offer multiple rental opportunities), basic policing, and light maintenance duties. Maintenance crew schedules could be staggered during certain times and seasons to limit the amount of part-time hours required.

While it is not recommended that admission fees be collected at sports-focused facilities such as the Courthouse Park, Park Attendants will be required at these facilities to perform the duties listed above, as well as basic tasks related to preparing athletic fields for play and assisting park users. A constant staff presence will only be required at these parks during peak field use hours, which will primarily occur seasonally on weekday evenings and on weekends.

6) **Interns** – Student internships provide a cost effective opportunity for DCPRD to utilize eager workers that hold some existing knowledge and skills in relevant fields of study. Under the current staffing plan, one intern per year would be provided a primary project in addition to being exposed to the full range of tasks undertaken by DCPRD. Further developing the Recreation Information Center would be a primary project that would be a good fit for a student intern in FY15-16.

7) **Park Manager and Assistant Manager** – Once build out of Ashley River Park is complete, staff will be required to support

activities related to facility rentals, special events, equipment rentals, concessions (unless contracted out), and other revenue generating endeavors. Therefore, a Park Manager and Assistant Park Manager will need to be hired to manage these tasks. Their responsibilities would be extended to managing similar functions in other parks with these features.

8) **Recreation Coordinator** – As the park system becomes better established on or around FY20-21, providing programmed recreation opportunities will become a higher priority. At this time, a Recreation Coordinator should be hired to better facilitate the provision of such services. In addition to leading activities directly, the Recreation Coordinator will also be responsible for managing contractor-provided opportunities, marketing DCPRD recreational activities, and working with partners in programming recreational facilities.

### **Parks and Recreation Funding Sources**

The *2009 Master Plan* discussed a variety of typical park and recreation funding sources including general fund (property taxes), user fees, grants, donations, exactions, and partnerships. Each of these options can be an important part of the DCPRD funding puzzle, and an update on notable funding streams is found below.

### **2010 Parks and Conservation Bond**

In 2010, just a year after publication of the master plan, a 63% majority of voters approved a \$5 million bond referendum for the acquisition of property for parks and conservation as well as for the development of associated infrastructure. To date, these funds have been allocated as follows:

Ashley River Park Site	\$	1,620,286.48
Pine Trace Park Site	\$	1,063,466.39
Courthouse Park Site	\$	850,000.00
Ashley River Blue Trail Access Sites	\$	100,000.00
Conservation Commission Projects	\$	500,000.00
Unallocated Bond Funds	\$	866,247.13
		<hr/>
		5,000,000.00

Debt service on this bond is funded through the Dorchester County Capital Fund. The remainder of unallocated bond funding is recommended for Ashley River Park construction.

### **Recreation Fund**

As discussed in the Recreation Outreach Grants section above, until 2013 Recreation Fund 150 was primarily utilized to support efforts by community organizations and municipalities to provide recreation facilities and services to county residents. By 2013, no funds were transferred to outside organizations. This shift in policy centered on building capacity for direct provision of recreational facilities and services by Dorchester County. The Recreation Fund receives proceeds from the county's cable franchise fees. Currently, 50% of these proceeds are allocated to the Recreation Fund, and are estimated to total \$312,000 in FY 16-17.

Over two thirds of this amount (\$210,000) is utilized to pay debt service on the Pine Trace Site general obligation bond. The *2015 Update* noted that with the impending sale of a portion of Pine Trace to the developer, it was anticipated that debt service would be retired and those funds could be utilized to increase operational capacity including the addition of personnel. As detailed above, this sale will no longer happen due to wetland expansion on site, and the developer has been released from the contract. As a result, this recurring funding will not be available for other purposes until FY 17-18.



## **Primary Funding Source – Property Tax Millage**

### ***Operations and Maintenance***

The master plan reports that most county parks and recreation departments are funded primarily through a steady revenue stream from the general fund. In South Carolina, county general funds are made possible through property taxes. Options for securing an adequate recurring revenue stream for operations and maintenance of recreational facilities has been further investigated since the *2015 Update*. There appear to be two realistic options for establishing this much needed revenue.

One method would be the creation of a Park District where all property tax revenue would be dedicated exclusively for park and recreation endeavors. Formation of such a district would be approved through a voter referendum. Prior to the referendum, the legislative body of each municipality within Dorchester County would have to vote in favor of including property within their boundaries in the district. This provision is related to South Carolina’s “Home Rule” requirements. The tax bases of each municipality that does not choose to be included in the district would be excluded. Roughly fifty percent of Dorchester County’s tax base falls within a municipal boundary. Should significant portions of the count not be included in the district, a complex, inefficient, and administratively difficult task of developing and implementing in district and out of district fee structures would likely be required. As imposed by the passage of Act 388, any millage increase under the “district” method would be subject to caps as allowed by the CPI + population growth + look back millage formula. Dorchester County Legislative Delegation members have expressed some willingness to work with the county to proposed amendments to state law that would remove this cap for park and recreation districts.

The second and only other realistic option for generating the recurring annual funding necessary to implement the *Master Plan* is to operate Dorchester County Parks and Recreation as any other general fund department. It is expected an increase in millage, rather than a reallocation of scarce financial resources, would be required to fund annual park and recreation endeavors. As with any other general fund department, a vote by County Council as part of the annual budget process would apply any millage increases for parks and recreation on a countywide basis. Municipalities would not be required to “opt-in” through a vote of their legislative bodies. As imposed by the passage of Act 388, any millage increase under the “district” method would be subject to caps as allowed by the CPI + population growth + look back millage formula. This method would provide consistency to all taxpayers countywide and eliminate the need for complicated fee structures and cumbersome collection processes. It is also important to note here that due to a less aggressive park development schedule with less maintenance intensive components as detailed in the *2016 Update*, an incremental approach to increasing park and recreation operating allocations is possible and more suited to this method.

### ***Bonded Capital Projects***

Property tax millage (or another source such as cable franchise fees) for jumpstarting the projects recommended in this plan for bond funding would be separate from the recurring costs discussed above. This approval would be sought through a bond referendum. The advantage to this approach is that voter approved bond referendum do not impact state imposed limits on the counties' bonded indebtedness.

- Recommendation:*** 1) Place a bond referendum on the 2016 general election ballot to allow voters to approve funding for bonded capital park projects as recommended herein. Provide detailed information to voters regarding which projects the proposed capital portion of the millage will fund.
- 2) Work with Council to determine its preferred method for funding the annual recurring costs of operating a countywide park system.

### ***Hospitality Tax***

Dorchester County currently does not institute a hospitality tax. Hospitality taxes in SC generally create revenue from the sales of prepared meals, food, and beverages sold in or by establishments, or those licensed for on-premises consumption of alcoholic beverages, beer, or wine. Expenditure of hospitality tax proceeds is restricted to tourism-based projects. At this time, Dorchester County currently has a meager base from which it could draw hospitality tax revenues. Most eligible establishments are located within county municipalities that already have instituted a hospitality tax.

- Recommendation:*** 1)As these types of establishments grow in unincorporated Dorchester County and a need for tourism-based facilities is identified, DCPRD should revisit the hospitality tax as a source of revenue park system support.

### ***Grants***

Grant funding is an irregular, yet crucial funding resource for park and recreation agencies today. Staff is experienced in identifying and securing various grants for parks and recreation facility development. Since the *2015 Update*, staff has secured \$350,000 in grant funding: SC National Heritage Corridor Development Grant (\$100,000), SCDNR Water Recreation Fund (\$200,000), and DHEC-OCRM's Coastal Improvement Access Grant (\$50,000). Grant applications for the Recreational Trails Program (\$200,000) are currently pending. Dorchester County Public Works also received additional allocations for existing trail projects through the Transportation Alternatives program last year. Other grants opportunities for which DCPRD was ineligible to receive last year include the Undiscovered

SC Grant Program and Land and Water Conservation Fund. The Parks and Recreation Development (PARD) program is an ongoing grant source that is best utilized in coordination with municipalities in Dorchester County, as was the case with the PARD grant for improving the Sawmill Branch Trailhead at the Oakbrook YMCA.

***Recommendation:*** 1) Continue to monitor and seek major grant opportunities.

### **Donations and Sponsorships**

Donations and sponsorships are critical funding sources for park and recreation agencies. As the master plan notes, gift catalogues are a proven tool available to park and recreation agencies for the successful solicitation of donations. Corporate sponsorships are another demonstrated avenue for revenue generation for park facilities, programs, and special events. Because some individuals and corporations are more comfortable donating to non-governmental entities, Friends of Dorchester Parks created to lead this effort.

***Recommendation:*** 1) Hire Marketing and Development Manager to organize DCPRD efforts to secure donations and sponsorships.

2) Create a gift catalogue prior to constructing the first park.

3) Continue to facilitate the development and operation of Friends of Dorchester County Parks

### **Exactions and Recreation Impact Fees**

The *2009 Master Plan* discusses exactions as a common method for working with developers to ensure new residential developments contain nearby recreational opportunities for their residents. This is most often done through dedication of land for park space or a fee in lieu of land. Additionally, the plan recommends Dorchester County seek impact fees from developers to account for the demands these new households place on the recreation system. Currently, Dorchester County Planning and Zoning does have provisions requiring both basic open space and cultural resource areas (pocket parks, playgrounds, picnic areas, dog parks, multi-use meadows, trails, churches, etc.) for Planned Developments (PDs). The cultural resource areas are focused on usable leisure or recreational functions rather than preservation of open space. The cultural resource component requires either 5% or 10% of land be dedicated to this purpose, and varies depending on whether the density is defined as high or low. Currently, there are no impact fee provisions as recommended by the original master plan.

***Recommendation:*** 1) Continue to work with the Planning and Zoning Department to leverage useful public recreation amenities as part of the PD process.

2) Research park and recreation impact fee models implemented by similar jurisdictions. Work with Planning and Zoning Department to draft sample impact fee requirements for future consideration by County Council.

**Rentals, Fees and Permits**

Revenue generated through facility rentals, user (and other) fees, and event permits can be an important source of funding for park and recreation agencies. Parks are being designed with ample opportunities for revenue generation from these sources. It is important that fees are structure in such a way that the cost of collection of a fee and the services provided in relation to a fee do not exceed the value of the fee.

## ***Budgetary Impact of Recommendations: FY17-18 through FY20-21***

This section “pulls it all together” in the sense that it revisits the list of recommendations provided in the previous sections by estimating those recommendations’ impact on future capital, operating, and personnel expenses, and providing funding recommendations for the plan. It should be noted that many uncertainties exist as only highly conceptual design plans for most recreational facilities have been developed to this point. Ultimately, the characteristics and amenities of each recreational facility, which are cemented during the design phase, will be the major determining factor of capital, operating, and personnel costs. Parks will be designed and constructed within the context of available funding. The cost estimates and funding proposals found below provide a basic framework for voters and policymakers to utilize in determining the scope and nature of the park system that will serve Dorchester County in the coming years.

### **Bonded Capital Project Recommendations**

The Dorchester County Parks and Recreation Commission has voted to recommend to County Council that its highest priority projects be funded immediately through a capital bond referendum in November of 2016. It is anticipated that additional funding from donations, sponsorships, revenue generation, and grants will supplement to some degree the recommended bond proceeds. Previous cost estimates, comparisons to recently developed facilities in our region, and knowledge of current property conditions were all utilized in developing these bond allocation recommendations. The total cost of capital expenses that are broken down in the table below is \$12,500,000. The debt service on such a 20-year bond would translate to a sum equivalent to approximately two mills.

<b>Bond Referendum Proceed Allocations</b>				
<b>Project and Task</b>	<b>FY17-18</b>	<b>FY18-19</b>	<b>FY19-20</b>	<b>FY20-21</b>
<b>Courthouse Park*</b>	<b>\$ 1,500,000</b>			
<b>Ashley River Park*</b>		<b>\$ 3,500,000</b>		
<b>Pine Trace Natural Area</b>			<b>\$ 1,500,000</b>	
<b>Trail and Bike/Ped Infrastructure</b>			<b>\$ 3,000,000</b>	<b>\$ 3,000,000</b>
<b>Total Capital Expenses by Year</b>	<b>\$ 1,500,000</b>	<b>\$ 3,500,000</b>	<b>\$ 4,500,000</b>	<b>\$ 3,000,000</b>
<b>* Recommended funds are in addition to any 2010 bond allocation</b>			<b>Total</b>	<b>\$12,500,000</b>

It should also be noted that an estimated \$150,000 will be necessary to outfit the park maintenance crew with the tools, machinery, and vehicles necessary to maintain these facilities. Since it is anticipated that this crew will be housed out of Ashley River Park, this expense is included in the above bond allocation for Ashley River Park.

### **Other Capital Project Recommendations**

Other park capital recommendations from FY 17-18 through FY 20-21 are related to recurring annual funding for conservation endeavors, recreation outreach grants, and other pay as you go (PAYGO) projects. PAYGO funds are important as they allow for flexibility in recreational facility development endeavors that bond issuance often does not. PAYGO funds can be utilized to fund non-bonded projects, supplement bonded projects, address unforeseen capital expenses, and/or bank funding for future planned projects. The following is recommended for annual, recurring allocations:

<b>Annual Recurring Allocations for Capital Projects</b>	
<b><u>Project</u></b>	
<b>Conservation Projects</b>	<b>\$ 100,000</b>
<b>Recreation Outreach Grants</b>	<b>\$ 100,000</b>
<b>Trails Projects</b>	<b>\$ 100,000</b>
<b>PAYGO Projects</b>	<b>\$ 100,000</b>
<b>Total Recurring Allocations</b>	<b>\$ 400,000</b>

\*\*\*For the purpose of planning, the above costs are included in operating expenses as they are recommended to be recurring annual expenses\*\*\*

### **Operating Expenses and Recommendations**

For the purposes of this update, "Operating Expense" refers to the costs of all personnel and maintenance/operating items. A set of assumptions guide the determination of operating expenses. These assumptions are:

1. The majority of personnel are hired in correlation with the first major parks anticipated to open in FY17-18, and become fully operational in FY18-19. Additional maintenance workers, part-time staff, and a recreation coordinator are hired at a later date as deemed necessary by demand. Please refer to the "Staffing" section above for additional detail.
2. An initial in-house maintenance crew of three FTE positions will handle regular maintenance tasks at Ashley River Park, Rosebrock Park, River Access Sites, Trails, and Pine Trace Natural Area. This crew should be based at Ashley River Park. A "Basic Production Requirements Service Delivery Model" was utilized to determine the number of FTE positions required to maintain the parks system as envisioned in FY17-18. The model is attached as Appendix A. While the model recommends one and a half FTE positions, staff doubled this number to account for tasks related to cleaning, athletic fields work, trail maintenance, trash removal, and other irregular park tasks and projects. Inmate and

community service labor will be utilized as needed and as available to supplement maintenance crew staff.

3. A high priority during park design phases is to focus on reducing maintenance loads to the greatest degree possible, while still providing the major characteristics envisioned for each facility. Mowing and edging, while understood as necessary, will be kept to a minimum through planting native plants and vegetation that can be allowed to grow.

4. All turf applications are contracted out to the private sector. This has proven to be highly cost effective in neighboring jurisdictions. Turf applications are time consuming, require special equipment, and certifications based on specialized skills and experience.

5. The majority of mowing, edging, and turf application task are contracted out to the private sector. Again, neighboring jurisdictions have found similar arrangements to be most cost effective.

6. A pool of part time Park Attendants provide primary evening and weekend site coverage. These workers will perform basic maintenance tasks related to opening, closing, light maintenance, custodial services, rental management, basic park policing, and fee collection. The demand for these tasks will vary seasonally and therefore are most suited for part time labor.

7. As mentioned in the previous section, Outreach Grants, trail funding, conservation funding, and PAYGO funding are recurring costs that will fall under operating expenses for the purposes of this document. This proposed allocation is \$400,000/year in total.

8. There are no staff positions dedicated to athletic programming. Instead, DCPRD will focus on providing facilities and equipment for existing or new, volunteer-based organizations to run athletic leagues. Dedicating staff positions to such endeavors is unadvisable as significant costs are incurred that are rarely recovered at a high rate.

9. DCPRD assumes minimal responsibility for trail maintenance on Sawmill Branch Trail. The Town of Summerville currently maintains the full extent of the Sawmill Branch Trail. Discussions with Town staff have indicated capacity and intent to include the Transportation Enhancement funded extension to their maintenance operations. Eagle-Chandler Trail and other trail facilities will be maintained with a combination of private sector contractors and the in-house maintenance crew.

By FY20-21, when all bonded projects are open and fully operational, the total operating cost for the DCPRD park system is estimated at \$1,382,891. Of this sum, \$727,891 is attributed to personnel expenses and \$655,000 is attributed to non-personnel operating

costs. Of these non-personnel operating costs, it is important to remember that \$400,000 is actually budgeted for recurring costs for Recreation Outreach Grants, trails, conservation efforts, and PAYGO monies. Greater detail on these costs, including predicted annual increases in personnel and non-personnel operating expenses, is provided in the tables below.

Annual Personnel Expense					
Position	FY16-17	FY 17-18	FY 18-19	FY 19-20	FY 20-21
Carryover (with 2% inflation)		\$ 83,068	\$ 378,999	\$ 591,599	\$ 677,891
Director	\$ 81,439				
Admin. Asst.		\$ 40,000			
Maintenance Supervisor		\$ 55,000			
Marketing and Development Mgr.		\$ 60,000			
Park Maintenance Workers (3)		\$ 35,000	\$ 35,000	\$ 35,000	
PT Park Attendants*		\$ 95,000	\$ 76,000	\$ 38,000	
Student Intern		\$ 3,500			
Park Manager			\$ 50,000		
Asst. Park Manager			\$ 40,000		
Outdoor Recreation Coordinator					\$ 50,000
<b>Total Personnel Expense Per Year</b>	<b>\$ 81,439</b>	<b>\$ 371,568</b>	<b>\$ 579,999</b>	<b>\$ 664,599</b>	<b>\$ 727,891</b>
* Expense Based on Required Hours Rather than Positions					

Annual Non-Personnel Operating Expense					
Item	FY16-17	FY17-18	FY18-19	FY19-20	FY20-21
General Operating	\$ 40,000	\$ 75,000	\$ 110,000	\$ 120,000	\$ 130,000
Contract Maintenance Services		\$ 75,000	\$ 100,000	\$ 125,000	\$ 125,000
Outreach Grants		\$ 100,000	\$ 100,000	\$ 100,000	\$ 100,000
Conservation Funding		\$ 100,000	\$ 100,000	\$ 100,000	\$ 100,000
Trails Bank Funding		\$ 100,000	\$ 100,000	\$ 100,000	\$ 100,000
PAYGO Funding		\$ 100,000	\$ 100,000	\$ 100,000	\$ 100,000
<b>Total Operating Expense Per Year</b>	<b>\$ 40,000</b>	<b>\$ 550,000</b>	<b>\$ 610,000</b>	<b>\$ 645,000</b>	<b>\$ 655,000</b>

Annual Combined Operating and Personnel Expense					
	FY16-17	FY17-18	FY18-19	FY19-20	FY20-21
Personnel	\$ 81,439	\$ 371,568	\$ 579,999	\$ 664,599	\$ 727,891
Operating	\$ 40,000	\$ 550,000	\$ 610,000	\$ 645,000	\$ 655,000
Debt Service	\$ 209,696				
<b>Total Expense</b>	<b>\$ 331,135</b>	<b>\$ 921,568</b>	<b>\$ 1,189,999</b>	<b>\$ 1,309,599</b>	<b>\$ 1,382,891</b>



### **Operations Funding**

Currently, DCPRD operates on the transfer of 50% of cable franchise fee revenues collected by Dorchester County. In FY 16-17, this totals about \$334,000. Roughly two-thirds of these funds are currently utilized for debt service payments on the Pine Trace Bond. Once the debt service on the Pine Trace general obligation bond is retired in FY 17-18, the full cable franchise fee allocation to the Recreation Fund can be utilized to fund operations.

A steady, dependable revenue stream is as important to operations, if not more so, than to capital funding. The reasons are similar. Solid planning is enabled and DCPRD will be able to ensure recreational facilities will be maintained and operated at the level of service that users expect. DCPRD staff recommends a property tax millage, equal to at least \$800,000 in revenue per year, to fund parks and recreation operations by FY 20-21. This is currently about the same value as 1.6 mills in property taxes applied countywide.

Other forms of revenue will be realized in user fees, program fees, special event proceeds, sponsorships, rental fees, and permit fees. Though these funding streams are more variable in the parks and recreation setting, they are important nonetheless.

The recommended operations funding plan is based on the following assumptions:

1. The Recreation Fund cable franchise fee allocation remains at 50%. No annual growth is predicted.
2. Funding through property taxes in the amount of about \$800,000 1.6 mills (applied countywide) is allocated to DCPRD.
3. Fees, permits, rentals, concessions, etc. continue to grow modestly until Ashley River Park Phase II is fully completed and all rental facilities are open and being marketed to the public.
4. DCPRD strives to maintain a minimum Recreation Fund balance of 40% of operation costs. This provision allows for adequate cash flow and ensures an emergency fund for mitigating unforeseen circumstances.

By FY 20-21, DCPRD's total operating revenues are estimated to be around \$1,384,250. The tables below show the funding plan in greater detail.

Operating/Personnel Revenues					
Item	FY16-17	FY17-18	FY18-19	FY19-20	FY20-21
Cable Franchise Fees	\$ 334,250	\$ 334,250	\$ 334,250	\$ 334,250	\$ 334,250
Property Tax Millage		\$ 800,000	\$ 800,000	\$ 800,000	\$ 800,000
Fees, permits, rentals, concessions, etc.		\$ 50,000	\$ 125,000	\$ 200,000	\$ 250,000
<b>Total Operating/Personnel Revenues</b>	<b>\$ 334,250</b>	<b>\$ 1,184,250</b>	<b>\$ 1,259,250</b>	<b>\$ 1,334,250</b>	<b>\$ 1,384,250</b>

Operating vs. Expense					
	FY16-17	FY17-18	FY18-19	FY19-20	FY20-21
Total Operating/Personnel Revenues	\$ 334,250	\$ 1,184,250	\$ 1,259,250	\$ 1,334,250	\$ 1,384,250
Total Expense	\$ (331,135)	\$ (921,568)	\$ (1,189,999)	\$ (1,309,599)	\$ (1,382,891)
<b>Surplus to Fund Balance</b>	<b>\$ 3,115</b>	<b>\$ 262,682</b>	<b>\$ 69,251</b>	<b>\$ 24,651</b>	<b>\$ 1,359</b>

Fund Balance Projection					
	FY16-17	FY17-18	FY18-19	FY19-20	FY20-21
Projected Fund Balance	\$ 312,379	\$ 575,061	\$ 644,312	\$ 668,963	\$ 670,322
<b>As Percentage of Operating Expense</b>	<b>94%</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>48%</b>

### **Overall Funding Summary**

Operating costs have been reduced somewhat from the *2015 Update* due to changes in the development plans and programming for various park sites. Staff recommends the bulk of DCPRD capital and operating costs be funded through the dependable and dedicated revenue stream of property tax millage. On the capital side, two mills would be utilized for bond issuance in the amount of \$12,500,000. On the operating side, roughly 1.6 mills, \$334,000 in existing cable franchise fees, and revenue generated from rentals and fees would combine to fund personnel and non-personnel operating costs. These costs include \$400,000 in recurring funding for trails, Recreation Outreach Grants, PAYGO capital projects, and conservation projects. Though this plan is based on all 1.6 mills of operations funding being allocated immediately, some cushion exists to phase this millage increase in over the next five years. Assuming countywide applicability, in Dorchester County 3.6 mills (the total combined capital and operating recommended millage by FY 201-21) equals about \$19/year in property taxes on a \$150,000 (the county average) owner-occupied home.

## ***Conclusion***

In conclusion, progress has been made in improving Dorchester County's parks and recreation system over the last seven years, and plans for implementing a true countywide park system have been refined over the past year for Council's consideration. Much has been accomplished over the past year. DCPRD has a much clearer picture on how it will develop and operate its park lands. The Parks and Recreation Commission has recommended its top priority projects for a November 2016 bond referendum. \$350,000 in bond funding for capital projects was secured. Friends of Dorchester County Parks is gaining the stability and organizational capacity to be a major contributor to countywide park efforts. The primary obstacle faced in Dorchester County's quest to expand recreation offerings is a typical one – commitment of funding for the recurring costs related to personnel and operations. The information above serves as a guide for voters and policymakers to make important decisions regarding the manner in which Dorchester County will improve quality of life for county residents through provision of park and recreation opportunities in the near term. Since opportunities and challenges related to county park and recreation change constantly, it will continue to be important to update the Dorchester County Parks and Recreation Master Plan accordingly.

## Appendix A

Ashley River Park, Rosebrook Park, and Summers Corner Park									
Grounds Maintenance and Operations Standards									
Basic Production Requirements									
Service Delivery Model Structure I									
Grounds Standards	Total length of	Total length of	Playgrounds	Total Outside	Total Weedeat	Total Shrub & Flowers	Total Mowing		
	Edging (LF)	Sidewalk(LF)	Border (LF)	Blowing (SF)	Trees & Bdgs (LF)	Hands Weeding (SF)	ZTR Mowers (SF)		
	30,000.00	10000	1200	60,000.00	10,000.00	20000	2,000,000.00		
Total Min (per standard)	450.00	150.00	7.20	900.00	60	900.00	1606.98	Total minutes required to complete the tasks per standard	4074.18
Total Hrs (per standard)	7.50	2.50	0.12	15.00	1.00	15.00	26.78	Total hours required to complete the tasks per standard	67.90
Non-Productive Factor 1.35	10.13	3.38	0.16	20.25	1.35	20.25	36.16	Total hours required to complete the tasks per standard (including 35% Non-Productive Factor)	91.67
1.5 week cycle (LOS)	6.75	2.25	0.11	13.50	0.90	13.50	24.10	Total FTE hrs per visit	61.11
FTE	0.1688	0.0563	0.0027	0.3375	0.0225	0.3375	0.6026	Total FTE positions required to complete the tasks	1.5278
Assumptions									
1) This model is based on 7 functions:									
a) Edging									
b) Sidewalk edging									
c) Playground border edging									
d) Blowing									
e) Trees and Bdgs line trimming									
f) Shrubs & Flowers beds weeding									
g) Mowing									
2) This model is based on 8.5 hrs per day with the production rate of 5.5 hrs per day. We subtracted 0.5 hr for lunch time, 0.5 hr breaks time, and 2 hrs for travel time (windshield time), set up, clean up time which equates to a non-productive factor of 1.35									
3) Production hours requirements is equal to: Total required hours divided by 1.5 weeks cycle									
4) We used Grounds Maintenance Standards generally accepted by APPA and ANLA									
Other Regular Activities									
1. Trash Removal									
2. Litter Pickup									
3. Trail Repair/Maintenance									
4. Custodial Tasks									
5. General Repairs									
6. Field Prep									
Irregular/Seasonal Activities									
1. Pressure Washing									
2. Painting									
3. Special Event Assistance									
4. Minor Equipment Repair									
5. Spreading straw/mulch									
6. Park Amenity Development/Install									